DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 283 206 CS 210 652

AUTHOR Wilson, Edward, Ed.
TITLE The Special Student.
INSTITUTION Texas Joint Council of Teachers of English, Houston.
PUB DATE 87
NOTE 43p.
PUB TYPE Guides - Classroom Use - Guides (For Teachers) (052) -- Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT English in Texas; v18 n3 Spr 1987

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academically Gifted; Bibliotherapy; *Bilingual Students; Classroom Environment; Disabilities; Elementary Secondary Education; *English Instruction; *Foreign Students; *Gifted Disabled; Language Handicaps; *Mainstreaming; Neurological Impairments; Speech Handicaps; Student Needs; Teacher Role; Teacher Student Relationship; Teaching Methods; Writing Processes

ABSTRACT

The challenges and rewards of dealing with the many types of students that can be found in today's English classrooms--gifted, handicapped, learning disabled, second language learners--are addressed in this focused journal issue. The titles of the articles and their authors are as follows: (1) "Help Me Help You" (L. Quitman Troika); (2) "Students with Learning Difficulties in the English Classroom" (J. M. Kanning); (3) "What's Dyslexia? Texas Teachers' Dilemma" (E. B. Osburn, S. G. Cohen, and P. Swicegood); (4) "Encouraging Process over Product: Writing with Second Language Learners" (N. L. Hadaway and V. F. Tishe); (5) "How to Work with Language-Different Children in a Regular Classroom" (A. H. Cashman); (6) "France and America Meet at the Lectern: An Experiment in Team Teaching" (R. A. Mottram and M. Schock); (7) "The Handicapable Kid: A Catalyst for Growth" (H. Skrovan); (8) "Closed Faces" (J. Carlile); (9) "The Final Conference" (L. D. Evans); (10) "'Gifted' Low Achievers" (L. B. Johnson); (11) "'I'm Pretty Good At...'" (P. James); (12) "Meeting the Affective Needs of the Gifted through the Use of Literature" (B. Seney); and (13) "Compassion, Privacy, and the Act of Writing" (C. L. Record). (SKC)

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ED283206

ENGLISH IN TEXAS

VOL. 18 NO. 3 SPRING 1987

The Special Student

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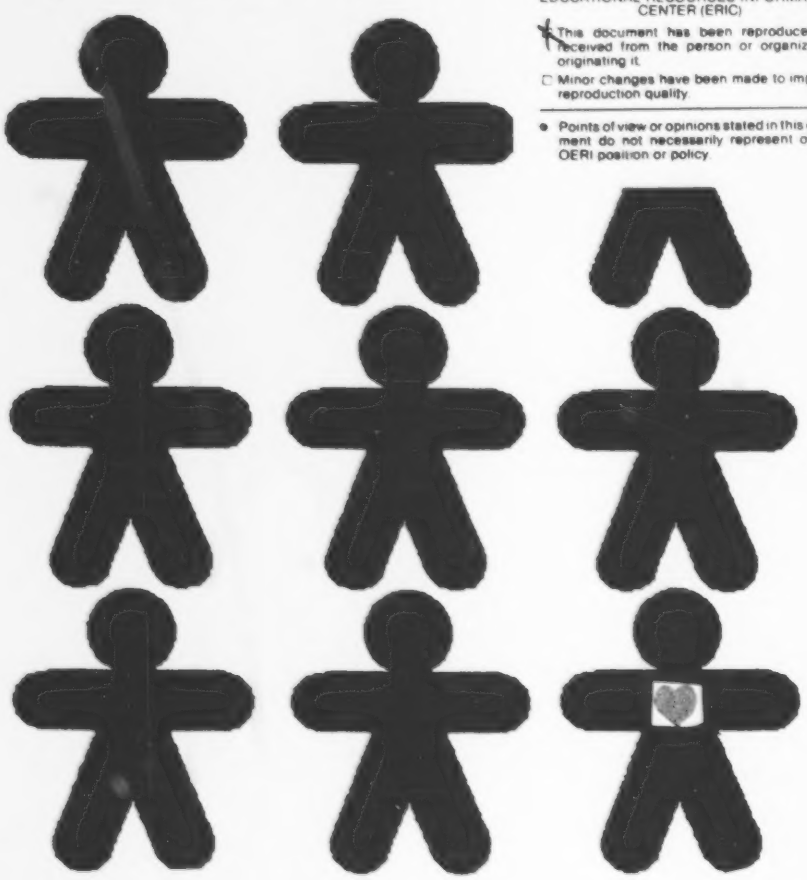

Help Me Help You
What's Dyslexia?
Closed Faces

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The Journal of the Texas
Joint Council of Teachers of English

Volume 18 SPRING 1987 Number 3 ISSN 0425-0508

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The editor will gladly receive manuscripts on any phase of English teaching or any topic concerning English teachers in elementary, intermediate, senior, or college level. Manuscripts should be typed and double-spaced through out, including any quotations with margins wide enough to accomodate printer's marks. Both author's name and school affiliation (when possible) should be on the first page of the manuscript. Footnotes should be eliminated and incorporated within the text. Include a self-addressed envelope with stamps attached (not pasted on) and a letter guarantee.ng the article has not been printed elsewhere and is not being submitted elsewhere. Receipt of manuscripts is acknowledged by a post card. *English in Texas* will attempt to reach a decision on each article within three months, probably sooner.

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Editor's Page

Between the vision and the execution falls reality. The vision for this issue was to celebrate the student: to bask in the ingenuity of all students. Especially, I wanted to see what teachers are doing with the regular, plain, reliable student. And then the reality fell. There is no regular student. To build on what Lynn Quitman Troyka shares with us, "that's why there is vanilla, chocolate, and strawberry ice cream." Even what seems to be plain is not. So by embracing the differences in our classrooms, we build and teach.

Between the vision and the execution falls reality. When at NCTE I asked Lynn Troyka if she would lead off this issue on the special student, she flattered me by saying yes. To her I am grateful. Through illness she kept her commitment. I want you as readers to know that what she says in her article is what she also does as a writer. She said to me in each conversation, "Eddie, what is it that you know about me and my teaching that you want me to write?" I shared with her what I had seen her do so well as she worked with professionals on all levels. I told her how I felt when she shared with us at the Washington CCC Convention stories about her students. How they taught her every day. And how in their teaching her, she taught us. In my way, I helped her by sharing my vision for this issue and she has indeed helped us. Her reality as a teacher makes the vision sing.

Between the vision and the execution falls reality. We expect it. We direct it. And as teachers we marvel it.

Between the vision and the execution falls reality. The covers always roam around my head trying to find form. They keep me awake at night. I try different ideas out on my students and in the end, the special student wins. So too is it with this cover. It was my special student who barely speaks, looks with eyes full of sparkle, who one day whispered to me, "Have a student with a heart." I do. I hope you all see the special student when you look at the cover.

Between the vision and the execution falls reality. The articles in this issue tell stories — stories of teachers in classrooms, teachers in hallways, teachers in conflict, teachers in hearts. The learning theories are here, though some authors have not named them, classified them. The pedagogies the teachers/writers are sincere, motivated and professional.

Between the vision and the execution falls reality. We teach all the students — not just the ones who come to learn.

Help Me Help You

Lynn Quitman Troyka

"This Is-s-land saw gr-e-een," June read aloud when I was individually assessing each fourth grader's reading that first week of school. June amazed me. I knew from the official records that she had an I.Q. of 160 and that she was sometimes a "behavior problem" who was almost skipped from third to fifth grade so that she would be kept busier.

Her eyes intently burrowing into the page, June read "The island was green" and sentences that followed it by separating words into syllables, reversing letters, stumbling, and re-reading. Her errors were perfect, her parody excellent. I looked for the giveaway of a mischievous smile or sparkle in her eyes, but June merely droned on. I decided not to intrude on her behavior until I understood it better. I assigned her to the lowest-level reading group. She beamed happily, carefully avoiding having to look me in the eye.

Later that week June and I worked together to inflate a dodge ball during recess. By then I had seen June excel in math, history, and science without inhibition. Yet, whenever the reading groups met, June moved eagerly to her assigned circle, picked up the reader, and looked at the words with knitted brow and squinting eyes. I had seen no demonstration of behavior that could be labelled a "problem."

"I guess you don't want the others to know you're a really good reader, huh June?"

June stared for a while at the inflating dodge ball and said without raising her eyes: "I forgot how to read over the summer."

"Well, okay. That's okay. Do you suppose your memory is a little better when you're not around here?"

"Sometimes. It comes and goes."

"How about a deal, June? I won't let on you're a good reader if you do two things: read one book a week at home that you and I agree ahead of time isn't too easy, and then stay after class every Thursday to discuss the book with me and sometimes to write about what you are reading."

This time looking me straight in the eye, she whispered, "Deal."

June and I kept the pact all year. I sensed that the other students knew what was going on — after all, June stood out in the other subjects — but they did not ask questions about June's private sessions. June was among the most animated, popular girl in the class, and she surely was not a "behavior problem." She jumped three more reading levels on the school's standardized tests at the end of the year.

June was my first experience with a "special" student. She was gifted. I was not aware of the term, for when I was a new teacher over twenty-five years ago, labels were not as popular as they seem to be today. Over the years I have taught many other gifted students placed in regular classes. Always, I have let them, and all other types of students, show me the way. I have known the curriculum, but I have watched for signals from the students about how to make them comfortable and ready to learn.

Probably more often than anything else in my teaching career, I have said in words or actions, "Help me help you." I want to understand what puzzles or escapes a student so that I can clarify, reclarify, and — finally — learn how to teach more effectively. Nothing has taught me more about teaching, or better facilitated my transactions with students, than has my interest in figuring out how other people's minds work. Differences, rather than similarities, have always intrigued me. Among the warmest memories of my childhood are the words my mother always said when I would bring her my discoveries of the differences I saw in friends, family, and strangers: "That's why there's vanilla, chocolate, and strawberry ice cream."

When I was interviewed for my early teaching jobs and was asked why I wanted to teach, I would start my answer with the words, "ice cream." That got the interviewer's attention (no small feat), and it gave me a few minutes to talk about my interest in the different ways that people thought and acted. If the interviewer was still listening, I would describe my wanting to spend my life trying to figure out how to transmit knowledge most effectively without trampling on each person's special way of learning and relating to others.

One of those interviews was a success, and I had a job. But I almost left teaching after my first year. I taught in a public elementary school near New York City. Quickly I found out that teachers were required to write and follow detailed lesson plans. Because I was a beginner, a supervisor checked my plans every week. I got through my plans each day, but my teaching was stiff. I held forth, doggedly covering those lesson plans, without any leeway to accommodate my observations about each student's needs. Partly because of my mother's ice cream philosophy echoed, and partly because I needed to eat and pay the rent, I decided to try teaching one more year. This time I decided to do it my way: know the curriculum, but shape the pace and materials to the student's needs. That was when I met June.

Robert was also in my fourth-grade class. He had real trouble reading second-grade material, and his handwriting looked like chicken scratches. Looking back, I suppose he was dyslexic. I know he was miserably unhappy. Luckily, another student in the class, Alice, took a shine to him and to his stories filled with imaginative beings and happenings. One day she wrote down some of her favorite Robert tales, and finally Robert was able to hand in work that he felt worthy of being hung on a bulletin board. In turn, Alice's stories began to get livelier. Soon they were collaborating, and at the end of the year they won a district-wide story contest.

Had I stuck to my lock-step lesson plans, the rigid setup that permitted me no way to listen and observe, I would not have gotten to know June, or Robert, or Alice. At the end of my second year of teaching, I was hooked. I gathered my courage, shopped around a little, and soon found a far better match between teacher and school.

My next job was in a student-centered junior/senior high school. It was there that the words "Help me help you" became my trademark. I was not aware how I often used those words, until a student helped me see. George, in my supposedly average eleventh grade English class, wrote me this note at the end of one of his essays.

> I tried to use what you said and showed about semicolons, but I think I did it wrong here so in case you ask your usual "help me help you," here goes in advance: I need to see (something easy) a sentence with semicolons instead of commas so I can see how the commas work with the semicolons.

My *usual*? Was I that predictable? I was, everyone in my classes agreed. I used those words often, usually half under my breath. Sometimes I only implied them by a look or my body language. The students told me they liked knowing I would ask them to help me help them; that my inevitable request made them pay better attention to their confusions and frustrations; and, best of all, that they knew I would never laugh and would always respect their observations of themselves. Gently, they also suggested that I lighten up a little and not pursue every single lead. Great teachers, those students.

At that same school there was a seventh grader who, often unable to explain what parts of the material she was having trouble with, suddenly started chattering easily when a twelfth grader from one of my other classes volunteered to help her because he was sitting in the room finishing an essay. That is how I learned to invite the junior and seniors assigned to "study hour," which everyone in the school justifiably dubbed

"Roman hour," to be teaching assistants in my classes. In turn, those teaching assistants taught me that upperclass students often enhance their feelings of self worth and, best of all, learn more when they are asked to teach. The roaming had stopped, a sense of community had blossomed, and in many cases SAT scores in comparison to PSAT scores went up dramatically.

When I joined the faculty of a community college in the late 1960's, I thought college students would think me unsophisticated if I asked them to help me help them. I was wrong. Invariably the students were eager to have the chance to point to exactly what part of a reading, or what part in a textbook, was a stumbling block.

Perhaps in the teaching of writing more than in any other subject, the temptation to rush in and decide what a student needs is great. Along with most experienced writing teachers, I am pretty good at finding errors, recognizing strengths, seeing room for growth. Also, I have honed some terrific ways of showing how things work: for example, I consider myself an ace at explaining how to get rid of the dreaded comma splice and how to write a graceful balanced sentence. But what about the students? For too many years, I marked up papers too much. Once I opened myself to getting signals from students, I became more discerning and selective. Most of all, I learned to invite students to talk to me in the margins of their essays. I answer in the same margins (we use *wide* margins). Students ask my opinion of an idea, of the support or development of that idea, of a stylistic flourish, of a point in grammar or punctuation, or whatever they want. Students can write "the works" at the top of a paper to let me know that they want me to decide what to comment on. In short, the student's help me help them.

I do not mean, however, that students decide the curriculum. Those decisions are up to the school or the department. Within those boundaries, I determine the substance of the material. For example in writing classes, I do not expect students to write in a vacuum, to experience the writing process without being engaged in matters of intellectual interest. I use what George Hillocks calls "environmental" approaches. Readings, simulations such as those in *Taking Action* (Troyka and Nudelman), case studies, and debates serve as stimuli for writing. As a bonus, writing is thereby integrated naturally with reading, speaking and listening, and the reasoning skills needed for ciritical thinking.

The so-called "special" students, like June and Robert, in my regular classes have taught me the most about how to help students learn. A prolific but dyslexic college writing student told me the first day of class that he loved to write and intended to write many pages, but because he knew I would not be able to read most of his material, he would give me a cassette tape of any paper he wanted me to respond to. A student from Haiti struggling to learn English used an orange highlighter pen to be able to "see" his verbs better, in imitation of my using a blue highlighter pen to set off sentence fragments for students who were having trouble "seeing" them in the middle of paragraphs. A blind student showed me that she had to be free to devise personal adaptations so that she could read Braille well (Troyka).

When I say, "Help me help you" to a student, I sometimes get a direct, useful answer. At other times, students might not know how to describe what is going on, or perhaps they misperceive what is happening. I observe and listen. I draw on my experiences with other students. Too, I accept that sometimes I am not sure what is going on and therefore can only promise to keep on the alret for hints and insights.

At the core, then, teaching means enjoying the differences among people. It also reminds me that Baskin Robbins and Haagen Dazs have dozens of flavors, some permanent staples and some totally new each month.

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Lynn Quitman Troyka, in addition to having taught at all grade levels, most recently at Queenborough Community College of the City University of New York, is editor of the *Journal of Basic Writing* published by the Instructional Resource Center of CUNY. She chairs the College Section of the National Council of Teachers of English. Her most recent book (1987) is the *Simon & Schuster Handbook for Writers*.

Students With Learning Difficulties in The English Classroom

Jimmie McGraw Kanning

Ron sat in the back of the room that September two years ago. His sluggish, somewhat stooped demeanor and his slow, deliberate speech suggested he was misplaced in my college-bound English class. Arms and legs sprawled from his desk, and his head rested on the simulated wood when he thought I wasn't watching. Two expressive writing assignments drew no response from him. During the third week of school, surprisingly, an in-class essay test over four short stories elicited 55 minutes of uninterruped writing. In the assignment Ron had to assume the role of principal of Make-Believe High School, confer with the parents of students (from the short stories) caught in the act of stealing, and in a memo for his files describe the behavior of these parents based on characterization in the short stories. Ron's paper came in with atrocious spelling and penmanship, incomplete sentence construction, and no awareness of punctuation; in short, his memo on the surface was illegible, nonsensical, and unreadable. Upon closer examination, however, despite the dysgraphia, his memo showed sophistication, sensitivity, and remarkable insight. For example, in describing one of the parents, Mrs. Kelvey, he wrote:

Ron's paper:
She come, Ion a sharled in her finesed dress, still abit totered, and cleary has beenmeaned more than once. As we set and talk I could clearly tell her distrece, not sure if it was concern for her dauter or the loss of work she was now lossing. I told her what had happen and my choices for punishment. I told her I choce a weeks suspension, I was sure that would pleases conoserdeing she could use the extra help. She then asked who the children where, I could not have told her, but being a small town I was sure she would fined out. I told, she asked what wold come of the othere, "we would see" I ansered. I could see a flash of anger, and then fade away. See understend the secsation, And I was glad to see se would not make a sene about her dauters thaking the bene.

Translation:
She came starched and ironed in her finest dress that was still a bit tattered and clearly had been mended more than once. As we sat and talked, I could clearly tell she was distressed, but I was not sure if she felt concern for her daughters or for the work she was now losing. I told her what had happened and my choices for punishment; I told her I chose a week's suspension. I was sure that would please her considering she could use the extra help. She then asked who the other children were. I shouldn't tell her, but since this is a small town, I was sure she would find out. I told her. When she asked what would happen to the others, "We would see", I answered. I could see a flash of anger on her face, then it slowly faded away. She understood the situation, and I was glad to see she would not make a scene about her daughters taking the blame.

While many of Ron's classmates struggled to regurgitate the obvious and, not finding it, lamely resorted to writing surface descriptions typical of first analyses, Ron wrote with understanding and compassion usually reached in later efforts. He concluded his memo:

Ron's paper:
The foulling day I called in all 5 children and we discussed why they had done it. I soon found out why. They we're give it to the orfuncty. Which they had suchked at the begening of the year but was trun down. This still does not exques them. I would like to turn mo head, but it is to late for Lil and Else, and total and unfair misjustes, but this is life and I an kot like them helpless.
After note
Lil return to school Else did not. Domed to a life like that of her mother. I close my eye's, and think she did this for kindness and reworded with cold.

Translation:
The following day I called in all five children, and we discussed why they had done it. I soon found out why. They were giving to the orphanage from which they had solicited at the beginning of the year but had been turned down (because of the lack of funds). This still does not excuse the students. I would like to turn my head, but it is too late for Lil and Else. It is totally unfair and a miscarriage of justice, but this is life and I am caught like them — helpless.
Afternote:
Lil returned to school; Else did not, doomed to a life like that of her mother. I close my eyes and think — she did this out of kindness but was rewarded with coldness and rejection.

In our first conference, Ron explained that he had moved often and had been in special education and basic classes through ninth grade. He had found a sympathetic ear at my high school when he demanded the chance to try regular classes. He excelled in math, but barely eked out D's in English in tenth and eleventh, albeit with supportive teachers. He persisted.

Is Ron unusual? Only in the severity of his problem. We teach his counterparts every year but often misinterpret the need for help. Consider Steven, fidgeting in his seat again. He has

popped up and down the last hour, asking to go to the bathroom, pleading for water, and talking to his classmates. His teacher, Ms. Meanswell, edges over to his desk, determined to get tangible proof of labor. She feels benevolent; surely anyone can copy from the board. Steven thinks he is saved from confrontation by a merciful bell, but Ms. Meanswell blocks his exit, demands the evidence, looks at the paper, and stiffens as she spies blatant spelling errors. "He simply does not care about school, English, or me," she sighs. "He won't even copy words from the board correctly."

Steven's classmate Lynn has a similar, careless attitude: she refuses to abide by punctuation rules. Commas, semicolons, and capital letters elude her. They pop up among her sentences with seemingly careless abandon. No drills or explanations remedy Lynn's use and misuse. Sandy, on the other hand, poses a different problem — she cheats. Homework, tests, compositions are all suspect, though Ms. Meanswell rarely catches her red-handed. Finally, Stan is the quintessential poor student — he is quick to announce this fact. Stan's first SAT score was 590. A swimmer with hopes for a scholarship, he needs a 750 to be eligible, but he reads very slowly and has poor writing skills in addition to a weak English background.

These students are representative of their classmates. We, like their unwitting teacher, routinely dismiss difficult behavior and weak performance as stemming from poor attitude, yet often we are being confronted by children beaten down by years of failure and frustrations due to conditions beyond their control. Harold N. Levinson, professor of psychiatry at New York University and director of Medical Dyslexic Treatment Center, points out that two out of every ten people have some form of learning dysfunction; others contend that as many as four or more out of every ten may have some learning disability, usually dyslexia, dysgraphia, dyscalculia. Statistically, at least six out of every thirty-member class face impediments to learning. For countless reasons these students are not identified as learning disabled (LD) but struggle in basic, regular, and honors English classes in all grades; they are too often overlooked or misunderstood. They have difficulty with reading, writing, spelling, organizing their thoughts and their lives, following instructions, or attending to a task for a reasonable length of time. Often they incur their teacher's wrath because, inexplicably it seems, they may perform well on occasion. In reality their academic situation is analogous to that of a 110-pounder coerced to try out for the football team every fall amidst the 180-pound hulks. We are not surprised when the hapless would-be player begins to hate the game or, worse, himself for not being good enough; what then is surprising about the behavior of those students in our classrooms?

Researchers disagree about the cause of learning difficulties. One prominent view is the split-brain theory, which ascribes to the underdevelopment of the dominant hemisphere of the brain as the probable etiology (U.S. Department of Health 18-47). Dr. Levinson, on the other hand, believes that inner ear disturbances cause the symptoms of learning difficulties because of the functions and relationships of the inner ear with the brain. Other theories have been challenged recently because of burgeoning volumes of data from current brain research. Since minimal brain dysfunction (MBD) and purely psychological disorders, for a long time popular wastebasket diagnoses, could not provide understanding of the cause or hope for remediation of the mysteries of the condition, today they rarely surface as explanations.

More difficult than explaining the causes is getting appropriate help for the secondary student. Ms. Meanswell may be teaching in a school system where specialized help is available for Ron, Steven, Lynn, Sandy, and Stan; but most middle schools and high schools can offer them little beyond remedial reading and life-skills-oriented special education classes, limiting their academic opportunities in the long run. Since students with very low IQ's may also have learning problems, special education classes are indeed helpful for them. Secondary students of average-and-above IQ's, however, aspire to the same goals as their

disability-free classmates and struggle in the school's mainstream, lost in the limbo of the limitations of well-meaning counselors and teachers. Ms. Meanswell has them in her English class but has not been trained to recognize their special needs nor to meet those needs. Professional though she may be, she can be seduced into seeing them as lazy, uninterested, and purposely disruptive.

A first step toward helping students, then, is to be alert to the possibility of existence of learning problems. Steven's spelling errors as he copies material from the board were not caused by carelessness: Steven may not see the words as other students see them or he cannot reproduce them onto paper. Lynn cannot use punctuation symbols correctly because of her impaired short-term memory and visual perceptual distortion. Sandy cheats because cheating is the only way she knows to handle the tasks set before her and to prevent anyone from finding out how "dumb" she is — she is a poor reader. Sandy's defense is typical; emotional problems and poor self-image are commonly seen in these students by the time they reach secondary school. In her autobiography *Reversals*, for example, Eileen Simpson describes the extremes and desperation of her high school years as she strove to hide her illiteracy. She ultimately received advanced college degrees. Nelson Rockefeller, General George Patton, Thomas Edison, and Albert Einstein achieved incredible successes despite serious learning disabilities (Levinson 164). Learning dysfunctions are not automatically the kiss of defeat. Though people with these problems must work much harder than others at similar tasks, they often find ways of compensating. The perceptive teacher knows when students need help and does not compound the problems with put-downs, punishment, or neglect.

Learning disabilities take diverse forms. Levinson describes thirteen major categories from his 20-year studies of over 10,000 cases: reading, writing, spelling, mathematics, memory, speech, grammar, hyperactivity . . . and impulsiveness, concentration and distractibility, . . . behavioral disorders, direction, time, and balance and coordination (107-135). We can be alert to these possibilities and apply our own common sense with professional expertise to come up with possible approaches for each student's problems. The next step is to investigate problems in any of these areas. To be most effective, we can enlist students' help in finding out why they are having trouble. Individual conferences early in the school year, or at any time the student's performance suggests learning problems, present the opportunity to ask key questions. Has reading or spelling or grammar always been difficult? How and why has English been a difficult course in the past? Both student and teacher try to pinpoint where the problems exist, the teacher adding insight and diagnosis to the student's own observations.

Lack of sophisticated diagnostic skills should not discourage any teacher. Mary MacCracken, a therapist specializing in LD students, describes her approach:

> It is necessary to know each child in detail, adding one tiny speck after another. Nothing ignored — everything important — until all of a sudden the child comes clear to me and I can see what needs to be done. The label is the least important part, and I have finally stopped fussing over which term is best. It is the child himself who matters. (Turnabout 13)

This philosophy is helpful to the classroom teacher, as well, who has 100-150 students and is not a trained therapist. For us, the most important aspect of working with students with learning differences is honesty. Students accept the teacher's lack of knowledge about the cause and the ambiguous terminology of their conditions, relieved to hear that they are "not dumb". They know, however, that something is wrong because they have not learned or performed as other students, and they long to know what they can do about it. Lynn cried tears of relief and joy after several meetings when I insisted that she was indeed academically strong despite what her grades in English implied. She went on to do well at a four-year

university, armed with facts about her abilities and her disabilities and strategies to succeed. Students' feelings of self-worth improve as they experience a realistic sense of achievement. These students may never make A's in English; they can, nevertheless, feel exhilaration in some successes in the English classroom and experience genuine satisfaction from D's or C's they have struggled to earn. Benjamin S. Bloom insists that nearly all students are capable of learning at every level (All Our Children).

Not surprisingly, students themselves offer valid suggestions in approaching the problems. Many students have difficulty writing with a pen and will ask to use a pencil. Whether the pencil is easier to manipulate or there is added stress with the permanence of ink is uncertain, but this simple accommodation is often surprisingly helpful. Most students favor typing out assignments and should be encouraged to take typing. The computer offers even more valuable lifelong assistance to these students; word processors enable many students more clearly to see what they have written, remove the onus of poor penmanship so common to these students, help with ordering compositions, and aid in spelling and punctuation with correcting software. Another tactical approach is for the student, under the teacher's direction, to overcompensate for an onerous problem. Making huge periods, drawing faces in oversized periods, underlining the first word to each sentence as a reminder to capitalize the first word and only the first word, illustrating and carefully copying commonly misspelled words, and using any device created to make students aware of problem areas will cause improvement or, at least, raise a mental flag to alert them to their potential mistakes. Pocket dictionaries, handbooks, and special guides are standard equipment for students with learning problems; however, they won't know when and how to use these aids without simple, specific drills.

Writing is the English teacher's most important opportunity for helping with problems. We can work with each student individually, recognize and remark on those strengths they display, inform students when they can reasonably rely on others for help, and, in effect, guide the students' energies to the most productive and important aspect of their writing. We teach them to get someone strong in mechanics to go over their final drafts with them because they are personally responsible for correctness even though they are not proficient spellers or grammarians. We realistically point out that outside help abounds for mechanics and spelling weaknesses but that the essence of their writing is what they have to say and how they say it.

Students with learning difficulties need instruction from different approaches; visual, auditory, and kinesthetic. M. C. Wittrock, in surveying brain research, concludes that teachers need to understand and to facilitate the information-processing strategies of the learner. Teachers can vary presentations and assignments to offer more possibilities for success and growth in students. Flexibility in allowing students to respond to assignments is important, also. Occasionally a student's grades will improve dramatically by taping important class lectures or by responding orally to certain tests. Explicit guidance in time management and organization of studies is the crucial component to all approaches: an English assignment book and calendar are necessary for the students themselves and important to parents or tutors trying to help.

Ron and I had some lucky breaks in scheduling in his senior year, enabling us to tap several resources. My third-period conference coincided with an elective class and a sympathetic teacher who periodically allowed him to work with me and a National Honor Society peer tutor during that time. He had extensive practice and direction in putting a paper together, in shaping and organizing that paper, then in refining and editing. He color-coded errors and weaknesses, worked on syntax and diction extensively, and outlined, especially after he wrote. He wrote four or five drafts before the final essays. Phenominal growth

occurred in his reading, participation, logic, analysis, and confidence. Though he had mild reading problems such as substituting words or omitting words, he read with excellent understanding. He was a strong student of literature, favoring poetry. He also wrote poetry — sensitive, imaginative, sophisticated work.

Ron had weak study habits and lack of early instruction to overcome. Since he had to work that school year, I doubt he showed much improvement in study skills. He had to write his last analytical paper, for example, when he got home from work at 11:30 each night. He retook objective tests on occasion before he could pass them. I suspected learning problems in organizing information and in reading. I could not guess how much of those problems were the result of dismal academic background versus true learning problems. His inability to write, however, was a severe handicap that belied his intelligence and abilities. Ron learned to seek help. He was a warm, friendly young man willing to work through or around his learning difficulties. By the end of the year his demeanor reflected more confidence. In writing about "The Hollow Man", he observed:

> What makes a great poem is not necessarily what concept it related when it was written. What distinguishes a great poem is how it stands the test of time — how people of different ages can get something out of the poem that relates to their world . . . [Eliot states] that when the world ends, it will not be in a great last battle, but because of [our] lack of caring, sharing, and loving.

The possibilities for support and growth for all our Rons are endless because teacher and student learn from a problem-solving, trial-and-error approach. They tap all available resources: tutors, parents, couselors, even other students with learning problems. An otten overlooked source of strength, moreover, is the student's participation in sports. Since improved academic performance often parallels increased physical activity, English teachers have a stake in encouraging physical training and in capitalizing on the ideas, training techniques, and self-discipline athletes bring to the classroom. We become a team — student, teacher, and all the resources we can muster. These students may always need help in their problem areas, but our job is to do whatever is necessary to help them succeed. We start where they are.

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What's Dyslexia? Texas Teachers' Dilemma

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As an educator in Texas, you are aware of the recent legislation regarding dyslexia and perhaps concerned about it as well. If so, you are in good company. While we have a number of serious concerns about this legislation, we chose to focus mainly on two: why children may be inappropriately diagnosed and labelled; and why the instructional techniques recommended for use are inappropriate for anyone with a reading or writing problem, particularly some who may be truly "dyslexic."

Beware inappropriate diagnosis and labelling

There is a great deal of controversy surrounding the use of the term dyslexia and the nature of the problem. As defined in the Texas Education Code Section 21.924 " 'Dyslexia' means a disorder of constitutional origin manifested by a difficulty in learning to read, write, or spell, despite conventional instruction, adequate intelligence, and sociocultural opportunity." However, dyslexia is defined in a myriad of ways. Randomly selected, fifty sources defining dyslexia would likely find overlap among some, but would also find a great deal of discrepancy regarding the characteristics and etiology. Furthermore, dyslexia is actually not recognized as a specific condition by prominent specialists in the fields of reading, psychology, learning and special education (Dorman 1985).

Our sentiments about the use of the term are best expressed by Hodges and Harris (1981) who note that dyslexia " . . . has come to have so many incompatible connotations that it has lost any real value for educators except as a fancy word for a reading problem" (p. 95). If the term is to be used at all, it should be reserved for a very small segment of the population and the "the label should not be applied without concrete evidence provided by a neurologist or neuropsychologist." (Hynd & Hynd, 1984, p. 485). Based on the state definition, it would seem imperative that a person credentialed to test for neurological impairment (constitutional basis) make the diagnosis. Yet, this does not seem to be the case. The guidelines stipulate, that "the identification will be made by the school district's designee" which can be, according to the guidelines" the superintendent, a principal, a counselor, a consultant, a specialist, a teacher — — someone who is knowledgeable about the dyslexia program and guidelines. Under these circumstances, the likelihood that children will be inappropriately diagnosed and labelled is high.

Beware inappropriate instructional methods.

The State Board of Education also approved ten descriptors of major instructional strategies to be utilized during Phase III with children who are identified as "dyslexic." Most of these strategies are usually in place in programs for children having reading problems, and are based on methods of instruction which have never been demonstrated to be effective with "dyslexic" children. In fact, they could exacerbate their problems. They are also inconsistant with the constructivist definition of reading, a perspective based on solid research, which is stated at the beginning of the TEA training packet on dyslexia. When analyzing the problems with the mandated programs, we offer suggestions for instructions that are more consistant with contemporary theory and research on language learning as well as with the constructivist definition of reading contained in the guidelines.

The instruction shall be individualized. The term connotes that both the materials and methods are matched to the stu-

dents ability level and learning style. In many instances, this means a management system or diagnostic prescriptive program in which task analyzed skills have been identified, and behaviorally defined which "appear" to be essential to achieve competence in reading. In such programs, the teacher monitors a student through a test-teach-test cycle. The underlying assumption is that to make progress, children should be drilled on the individual skills.

This view of individualization tends to fractionate reading, totally disregarding current knowledge that language, written language included, is essentially indivisable and by nature contextual. The components of the language system, the graphophonemic, semantic, syntactic and pragmatic components, are interdependent and when these components are isolated, they no longer consitute meaningful language. Additionally, there is no empirical evidence to indicate that these types of individualized diagnostic prescriptive programs are effective (Arter and Jenkins 1979).

One of the most enlightening axioms which current reading research has provided regarding individualization is that "the most powerful influence in learning is the knowledge that a person brings to the task." Recognizing that background knowledge may be different for every child in a classroom, it is wise to avoid regimented, artificial and fragmented skills programs which are unrelated to the individual needs of children. Therefore, in contrast to the fragmented drill, individualized instruction can constitute programs in which children eagerly read books of their own choice and actively create and share their own written texts. These programs have been popularized by terms such as individualized reading (Veatch 1966), language experience (Allen 1976; Hall 1978), and writing (Graves 1983, Calkins, 1986).

The instruction shall be multisensory. Multisensory, refers to attempts to include more than one mode of presentation of information — visual, auditory, kinesthetic (muscle sense). Traditionally, this has meant that children are instructed in writing single letters, first writing them in the air, then on paper with extra large letters. At the same time children say the common sound of the letter, i.e. "puh" for p, and then blend the letter with a familiar vowel sound, i.e. "pa." In this type of program, children first see, hear, and write single letters and then add other letters, **sometimes** making real words. This is the type of multisensory program advocated in the guidelines. It promotes fragmented and decontextualized learning while creating the mind-set in children that the ability to respond mechanically constitutes the essence of reading.

An alternative multisensory approach that is most consistant with solid theory and research suggests that children become actively involved with real reading and writing tasks. this might include such activities as reading a recipe for making a snack, following written directions to construct a model, drawing a sequence of pictures to represent and retell a story read, etc. These multisensory tasks not only involve visual, auditory, and kinesthetic behaviors, but capitalize on reading as a meaning oriented process.

The instruction shall include intensive phonics and synthetic phonics. Two generic approaches to teaching phonics exist: analytic phonics and synthetic phonics. An analytic phonics program presents words to be learned through common spelling patterns or phonograms such as an, pan, man, can, etc. A synthetic approach requires students to learn individual sounds of the letters first and then to blend sounds to create words, i.e.: blending the p sound, the common sound for a, and the n sound into "pan." An intensive approach takes children through either an analytic or synthetic phonics program which involves interacting with isolated letters and words.

This decontextualized instruction leads children to an overreliance on phonic elements of text to the exclusion of the other cueing systems and as a result children cannot use phonics functionally.

An approach more consistant with a constructivist definition of reading begins with a teacher reading predictable books that young children can easily remember (books such as "Brown bear, brown bear, what do you see? I see a red bird looking at me. Red bird, red bird, what do you see? I see a yellow duck looking at me." [Martin 1970]) which are accompanied by compatible pictures. After children are very familiar with the text and can match their voice with printed words, the teacher then uses words from the text to teach phonic elements, e.g. d-uck, tr-uck, cl-uck, pl-uck, encouraging children to use the new words in their own sentences. This type of instruction presents letter-sound relationships and also capitalizes on the language knowledge that children bring to the task.

Another powerful approach to teaching phonics is through writing. Many reading specialists are discovering that children learn sounds better through encoding to produce a meaningful message than through intensive meaningless phonics drills (McCracken and McCracken, 1972). An example of how this occurs is given by Bissex (1980) who noted that her five year old subject without any formal instruction was making sound-symbol relationships when he placed a sign on his door that read "DO NAT DSTRB GNYS AT WRK" (Do not disturb. Genius at work.) This is but one example of how a child can make connections with phonic regularities. It is the irregularities, when there are no relationships between the letters and sounds, that are the challenge; and these cannot be learned through intensive phonics programs. When children are allowed to write, there is a natural progression in the acquisition of spelling patterns, those following phonic rules as well as those that do not.

The instruction will be linguistic. In "linguistic" programs, reading material is prepared that sequentially introduces children to common sound units called phonograms. The result is that linguistic readers contain pages of sentences like "Dan can fan the man." Since the emphasis is on the recognition of words and not meaning, some "linguistic" reading materials might include even more nonsensical or schizophrenic sounding texts such as "Ning, nang, fing, fing, fap! San a pap, nas a tas!"

Linguists who are aware of how children acquire written and spoken language naturally, shudder at the thought of these unnatural materials being used to teach reading. They believe that materials should be used that are compatible with a child's language. Thus, the materials would be composed of texts with predictable sentence patterns, pictures, story structures, etc. and instruction would encourage children to use their tacit knowledge of language to predict and make sense of written texts. The language experience approach in which children dictate and read their own texts or a "total language approach," in which children write their own texts and read whole stories and books, both accomplish these purposes.

Instruction will be systematic, sequential, cumulative and process oriented. Programs with these descriptors are already in place in our schools. In search of better ways to help children learn to read, some educators have attempted to develop an ordered series of skills which would increase a child's knowledge about reading. In these systems, skills have been identified, defined and placed in a sequence. A program of this type would encompass all of the descriptors above and implies that each skill must be mastered for reading to occur, and that the skills must be completed in the predetermined sequence. Phonics programs, skills management systems, linguistic texts and basal reading programs are all

structured in this way. Yet, the sequencing of these skills is totally arbitrary and there is no justification for them to be considered developmental (Johnson 1977, Goodman 1978).

In contrast, there are reading programs that begin with an exploration of what children know (Clay 1985). This information is derived through observation and informal testing whereby the teacher examines individual strengths and weaknesses and then develops instructional programs on the basis of individual needs rather than on the basis of a predetermined sequence. One simply begins where students are and allows them to engage in the process of a total language program, provided with opportunities to do real reading and writing with support.

It is critical that teachers base their instruction on programs that will assure success; not with skills, but with improved reading comprehension. Teachers need to insist on meaning-based instruction, meaning-based from children's vantage points. This requires that teachers begin lessons with information that children have, chose meaningful materials, and encourage prediction and risk taking. Word identification skills and comprehension skills should not become the end in themselves, but rather the means for children to become independent readers. Such viewpoints are not limited to regular educators nor to reading educators. Indeed, professionals involved in the field of learning disabilities are increasingly aware that "by breaking the learning process into sequential instructional objectives, we strip from the activity the student's own interpretation from which she/he makes sense of the new information, making learning not less difficult but more so" (Poplin, 1984, p. 29).

Children with reading problems are more likely than not to be in fragmented and decontextualized programs like those being mandated and it is likely that these programs are preventing these children from making progress. Why is it then, that we begin our attempt to help children toward literacy by focusing on what is wrong with them, rather than what is wrong with the programs? Why is it that we do not try real reading and real writing programs first? This may save a lot of unnecessary and costly testing which can, under the present circumstances, lead to inappropriate diagnosis and labelling and then in the implementation of programs that are inappropriate for children with serious reading problems.

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LIFE

He always wanted to give things,
But no one liked the gifts.
He easily found things,
But no one gave him credit,
What he wanted he found,
And what he needed, he usually received.
But when his family passed away,
He was sent to an orphanage.
He was unable to look for things,
And seldomly received things.
But since he took care of the things he had,
He needed almost nothing.

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Encouraging Process Over Product: Writing With Second Language Learners

Nancy L. Hadaway and Viola Florez Tishe

We observed a high school English as a Second Language (ESL) class last spring to examine the types of writing being done and the types of student success. What we discovered might be typical of many out-dated language arts classrooms. Students were assigned topics for compositions, labored diligently over their papers, only to move on after one attempt to other topics and concerns. Texts complemented this procedure and emphasized formulaic models of composition such as narrative or persuasive paragraphs and grammar related structures. The end result was usually limited written output by the students. Their linguistic limitations were compounded by instructional techniques and materials.

As students progress through school, the requirements for them to produce more written text increases. For second language learners in the secondary schools, these demands may seem overwhelming. Not only are they expected to deal with print input, but they must also produce written output in a new language. Because of the difficulties these students face, teachers may ponder questions such as when and how to teach writing to limited English proficient (LEP) students. Often teachers assume that if these children are not already fairly literate in English, then writing should be postponed. However, outside the security of the ESL classroom, LEP students are expected to deal with the same assignments as other pupils. Therefore, they need coping skills if they are to maintain their self-worth and thrive in the content classroom. The recent emphasis on writing provides valuable language learning opportunities for second language learners.

What benefits does writing offer to second language learners? First, it focuses on meaning and content rather than form (Zamel). Previous product approaches stressed grammar and finished product (Watson). This often caused students to focus on structural features rather than the meaning conveyed. For LEP students, excessive emphasis on correctness in form can result in short, choppy compositions where the possibility of making mistakes is held to a minimum. Students are more anxious and thus afraid to take the risks needed to more fully express themselves. However, even though second language learners may lack syntactic and lexical knowledge, they still can communicate in written form, and when teachers focus on meaning, students are spared the distress of seeing their papers mutilated on grammatical grounds alone. Thus, the writing process can bolster self-concept (Reagan), and this is crucial to effective second language learning. LEP students need to experience a sense of expanding capability in their new language; they must believe they can write.

Composing is grounded in meaning in another way as well; students are freer to select topics of their own choice and thus write about more relevant and meaningful events in their lives. This alone often spurs greater output on the part of the second language learner.

Second, writing allocates time to write. Students write regularly and frequently. They rework and revise multiple drafts. In other words, students spend increased time on a topic before moving on. This is crucial to develop adequate second language writing skills. Second language learners need the oral language input surrounding their selected topic, and they need to revise and expand on their sometimes limited lexicon. In the high school ESL class we observed, when the students were given an opportun-

ity to discuss the topic prior to composing, and the subsequent writing tasks were simply an extension of the original topic, students produced twice as much written text.

Additionally, all skill areas are reinforced through participation in the writing process. Not only is composing emphasized, but students also have opportunities to expand speaking, listening, and reading ability as well.

Finally, through involvement in the writing process, students can become more responsible, independent learners (Hansen, Newkirk, & Graves). Modeling the process, teachers demonstrate a decision-making model whereby the writer chooses a topic and incorporates selected information, asks for feedback, and modifies the text based on input received. Thus, writing fosters learning and independence. Second language learners especially benefit from exposure to the writing process because they are given an opportunity to take risks, make decisions, and expand linguistically.

Classroom Applications

The writing process is easily incorporated into the ESL classroom even when the students are extremely limited in their langauge competence. Because the LEP child lacks vocabulary in the beginning stages of acquisition of a language, teacher emphasis must be on massive input and oral language development. This ties in with process approaches because pre-writing activities incorporate opportunities for students to draw, write, think, and talk about topics prior to beginning to write.

Utilizing a sound pedagogy provides ample opportunity for oral language development. Pre-writing activities, writing conferences between teacher and students, and group or peer editing techniques all provide a rich variety of oral input which second language learners must have in order to acquire a new langauge, its syntax and lexicon (Krashen & Terrell). When teachers model writing from topic selection to final publication efforts, students are receiving input which contributes to oral language development. As students work collectively to brainstorm ideas for topics, engage in pre-writing discussion, and work through revision concerns in groups, they are exposed to real language at a variety of levels. This only serves to further encourage language growth. Discussing a topic impacts on the amount of language a student is able to generate, and with more language on the page, the student is able to receive more feedback. As Kirby and Liner note, "getting it right comes from getting it down" (p. 16). LEP students must have the chance to manipulate and experiment with language prior to focusing on final concerns such as form.

Furthermore, not only does oral language benefit from participation in writing, but more efficient reading is another by-product (Hansen, Newkirk, & Graves). Students must read in order to write. They are involved in reading when they go back through their own or other students' papers for revising and editing purposes. In addition, teachers often link reading assignments to writing requirements. The more students write and are involved in their writing, the more they have a chance to read. Further, as LEP students work together to peer edit, they become aware of the many difficulties in communicating effectively to different audiences. Because linguistic ability and ethnic/cultural background are quite diverse in most ESL classes, writers must consider their audience and become language mediators if they are to work successfully as a group.

Of the stages in the composing process, pre-writing is perhaps most important. This is a phase of planning and purposeful commitment to a writing topic. For the LEP child, this stage provides an opportunity for thinking in English and for expanding oral language capability. A multitude of pre-writing strategies are possible including brainstorming options to a problem, semantic mapping or webbing, role playing, and

artwork. Webbing is particularly helpful for generating relevant vocabulary. In this process, the teacher begins with a central core such as teenage concerns and then branches out with descriptors such as dating, music, parents, family, friends, and school. Skills can also be incorporated into this by discussing nouns (places teenagers go and people they deal with) and verbs (teen activities — driving, dancing, studying).

Finally, writing includes extended composing tasks which are helpful to second language acquisition. Writing assignments given in a hit or miss fashion with only one attempt at composing do not provide adequate opportunities for language growth. Teachers need to incorporate conferencing techniques, peer editing, and publishing activities in the ESL classroom. For instance, we observed one assignment in which the high school ESL class wrote about what they liked or disliked about American schools. This could have provided an excellent chance for further expansion. The class could have begun the week with a discussion and webbing activity on American schools, and afterward, students could write and have opportunities for teacher/peer feedback via conferences and group editing. Students could eventually choose their best effort and work it into a published book that could be illustrated and bound for the class. Thus, second language learners would have an opportunity to participate in the entire writing process from beginning to end.

In summary, LEP students can communicate in written form when teachers create a positive climate via current writing techniques. In this manner, students can develop their knowledge of writing as well as their knowledge of English.

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Making Meaning

Words custom made
to fit your every need;
One for your heart,
and one for your mind.

Phuong M. Nguyen
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How To Work With Language-Different Children in a Regular Classroom

Ana H. Cashman

Maria arrives early in the morning looking very shy with a pencil and a notebook. She is placed in Mrs. Ross' classroom, where no one speaks her language. She sits there not knowing what to do. She tries imitating the other children, but is overwhelmed with her new environment. Everything is so strange and different from her little school house back home. She is too frightened to talk, knowing she is not going to be understood. By the end of the day Maria is so frustrated, has cried most of the time, and wishes she had never come to school. Poor little Maria!

Maria and many more children go through the same experience every year. Due to the lack of trained teachers, the large number of language-different children and the pull-out system in the bilingual programs in our schools, the non-English speaking child spends the largest part of the day in the regular classroom. The regular classroom teacher is faced with the task of finding different methods to teach these children. Teachers often express concern about their lack of ability to assist children who are learning English as a second language.

The following are ideas that the teacher can adapt during the day to meet the needs of the LEP (Limited English Proficient) student:

1. Make the child feel comfortable and part of the class by including him or her in different activities throughout the day. Distributing papers, collecting books, erasing the chalkboard and straightening the learning centers are simple activities that the LEP student can take part in.

2. Read books and poems aloud using repetitive language and lots of illustrations which extend meaning. Some books with repetitive language are: **The B Book, I Know an Old Laby, The Bus Ride, The Lion's Tail, The Haunted House,** and **Brown Bear, Brown Bear What Do You See?. Chants for Children** by Carolyn Graham also has songs and poems with repetitive language.

3. Read stories that relate to the LEP child's background and experiences. Through the intertaction with the stories the child can build meaning and acquire some language. Two examples of such stories are: "We Laughed a Lot, My First Day of School" by Sylvia Root Tester, and "A Boat to No-Where" by Maureen Worski. These stories deal with experiences about Mexican-American and Vietnamese children.

4. Assign another child, possibly another bilingual child that can understand and speak English, to help the LEP child until he or she gets acquainted with the classroom routine. It's a good idea to separate them as soon as the LEP child starts showing signs of understanding English, so he or she won't become dependent on his or her friend.

5. Spend a few minutes every day sharing words in the LEP child's language, to show him or her that you care about his or her langauge. Make a list of these words and place them in a stragetic place in your classroom. These words will serve as a focus of interest for cross-cultural disucssions.

6. Allow the LEP child to participate in creative writing by using his or her own language. He or she can explain it during teacher-student conferences using pictures or mimicking.

7. It is very important that teachers show special sensitivity to the LEP child's culture. By observing the child in and out of the classroom, the teacher can learn about the LEP child's cultural behavior.

By doing these simple activities, the teacher can give Maria the security and understanding that she needs. It is so rewarding to see the LEP child responding just like the rest of the class. With the help of her teacher and her peers, Maria will become very successful and eventually competent in English.

Ana H. Cashman teaches at Glen Lock Elementary in The Woodlands.

France and America Meet at the Lectern: An Experiment in Team Teaching

Richard A. Mottram and Marie-Dominique Schock

Not long ago our headmaster approached us about team teaching a course in comparative literature. Several factors made the suggestion intriguing. Our school is international with a pronounced French flavor. One of us is a native of France with a Ph.D. in French from an American university; the other is an American with a Ph.D. in English. The two of us could design the course, which we would then teach to two sections of eleventh grade students, most of whom would be either American or French. The project would be completely new and would demonstrate to the campus community the spirit of international education. And it sounded like fun. We immediately agreed to take part.

Some background about our school will illustrate why such a project makes sense. The Awty International School employs two faculties — one American, one French. The school offers two curriculums — one French, one American. The objective of the American curriculum is to prepare American students for admission to American colleges and universities. The French curriculum is designed to prepare students to pass the highly demanding French baccalaureate examination.

In addition to the French and American students, boys and girls from approximately twenty-five other countries are enrolled in the school. Although all students enroll formally in one of the academic programs, most take courses in the other curriculum. Additionally, some foreign graduates remain in the United States and attend American colleges. Team teaching by faculty members representing both curriculums certainly seemed like an idea whose time had come.

The two of us spent a summer selecting material and organizing the course, discussing our goals and exchanging views about specific texts. We discovered that we shared certain approaches to literature and to teaching, while also noting some differences. We concluded that attempts to reconcile our differences were neither necessary nor desirable. Our calculation was that presenting differing views would insure lively discussions and result in independent thinking by the students.

During the summer our headmaster informed us that recently discovered scheduling problems were going to prevent our teaching together five days a week; instead, our experiment would take place one hour a week with each section of eleventh graders. On the other four days an American faculty member would teach a chronological survey of American literature.

Our planning meetings led to several decisions regarding the nature of the course. We would teach several genres during the year: drama during the first semester;

poetry and non-fiction prose in the third quarter; and the novel during the final quarter. It was also concluded that any attempt to make our classes dovetail with the American survey would be futile.

Our examination of drama during the first two quarters would center on tragedy. Our study of poetry in the third quarter would concentrate on several Nineteenth Century American poets to allow us to look for possible influences on selected Nineteenth and early Twentieth Century French poets. The objective in including Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century non-fiction prose writers was to introduce our students to a number of significant philosophical thinkers in France and the United States. The final quarter would include a study of images of love in French and American novels. Several selections by writers from other nations were added to provide additional balance. We also agreed to hold one planning meeting each week.

Since the students had not been informed of the voyage they were about to begin, we spent time during the opening week of school explaining to them the nature of the journey. They were enthusiastic, especially when they began by examining Edward Albee's **Who's Afraid of Virginia Wolf?**

During our first class the two of us performed tentatively. We were overly sensitive to one another's perceived rights as class leader, and we seemed especially fearful of exposing ourselves as mere mortals in front of thirty pairs of penetrating eyes. We quickly discovered, however, that we were enjoying ourselves, that we were responding easily and intelligently to each other's observations and insights, that we were communicating effectively with the students and they with us, and that considerable learning was already taking place.

Three weeks later we concluded our study of Albee's play by showing the students the Taylor and Burton film. Not one of the thirty students had previously seen the film, and after viewing it, most concluded it followed the play closely and was one of the most emotionally draining films they had ever seen. They were anxious to proceed with the next play.

The students spent the remainder of the first semester studying the use of tragedy in several dramas. A comparison of Sophocles' **Antigone** with **Antigone** by Anouilh emphasized how a Twentieth Century French dramatist could convert an ancient Greek Play into an equally powerfully modern tragedy. The two classes concluded their examination of drama by studying similarly destructive aspects of passion in Shakespeare's **Othello** and Racine's **Phaedra**.

During the third quarter the course emphasized French and American poetry and a limited amount of non-fiction prose. The students studied Poe, Whitman, and Dickinson, and concentrated especially on demonstrating Poe's influence on Baudelaire and the French symbolists: Mallarme, Rimbaud, and Verlaine. Montesquieu's **Persian Letters** and the essays of Emerson and Thoreau were reviewed so that students could attempt to identify common threads in the philosophical ideas of Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century French and American writers.

The fourth quarter was easily the most enjoyable, as the students examined images of love in four novels: **The Awakening**, **The Great Gatsby**, **Madame Bovary** and **Swann in Love**. Each class discussion seemed more dynamic than its predecessor as the students compared Jay Gatsby's obsession with Daisy Buchanan with that of Charles Swann for Odette de Crecy; Emma Bovary's passions with those of Edna Pontellier; and the influences of the time and the culture on the novelists and their works. Our experiment concluded with another film: the Redford version of **The Great Gatsby**.

Early in the year it became evident to us that a limited amount of weekly planning for each class worked best. Perhaps we allowed intuition to guide us too much, but we rarely regretted such a decision. On the few

occasions when we tried too carefully to plan specific contributions to the discussions, we usually concluded that our classroom effectiveness suffered.

Preparing and grading written assignments proved to be only a minor irritation. We gave essay exams exclusively and scored each test individually; then, we compared our scores and reconciled our differences. If the differences were minor, we simply awarded the student the average of our two scores. If the differences were pronounced, we reread the answers, discussed them, and agreed jointly on a score. We followed essentially the same approach when grading papers. Although we explained our procedures to the students, we never revealed, in spite of continual pleas, our initially arrived at scores.

Determining course grades could have proved more trying than scoring tests because of our considerable emphasis on student participation in class. Our apprehension, however, proved to be unnecessary. We held meetings at the end of each quarter, evaluated each student's performance during class discussions, and awarded a numerical value for it.

The end of the school year arrived too soon. Several plans will have to wait for another year for implementation, including a formal student evaluation of us and of the course. We did conduct an informal canvass of students, and every member of the two classes who expressed an opinion enjoyed the course and recommended that it be repeated next year. Many students also suggested that team teaching be expanded to other academic areas of our school. Discussions had occurred early in the year about future expansion, and key administrators and faculty members often visited our classes. Those who attended one or more classes voiced pleasure at what they observed, and many expressed a desire to participate in a similar project

The two of us conducted our own evaluation of the course and the potential at Awty for expansion of the concept. It was clear that the cultural diversity of our students had contributed immensely to many stimulating class discussions. Mixing Greek and British masterpieces into our predominantly French and American menu had added a positive flavor that would have been otherwise impossible. Our casual approach to weekly planning and our reliance on spontaneous reactions to one another's observations had added a sense of naturalness to the classes without weakening the educational value of the course.

Perhaps our most important conclusion involved the necessary qualities for teachers interested in attempting such a project: strong egos, a considerable amount of humility, and an active sense of humor. Teachers must be willing to relinquish the position of unchallenged authority figure in the classroom. The personal chemistry must be good. They must present a united front on certain basic issues, such as course requirements, expectations of students, and grading policies, while maintaining the right and the responsibility to disagree on issues generated by the content of the course. Finally, they must be willing to contribute the extra time required to make the course successful.

Was there enjoyment and profit in our experience? Do we plan to team teach again? Was it an exciting educational experience that other teachers at our school and elsewhere ought to try? The answer to all three questions is a resounding yes. We learned a great deal about one another's literature and educational system and benefited tremendously by observing the techniques of a fellow professional on a regular basis. Even more important was what we gained from thinking and working as a team and experimenting regularly with different techniques, some of which evolved as a consequence of particular classroom situations. In our judgement, the classes were always more effective because of such experimentation; therefore, the students always benefited.

Not only will we team teach again, but we

intend to expand our efforts. We next plan to spend an entire year comparing a number of French and British masterpieces. In addition, two of our colleagues in the history department are considering introducing a team-taught course in the history of France and America.

Although most American independent schools do not have either the number of foreign students or faculty members that Awty has, teachers and college-bound secondary students in any school would benefit a great deal from this kind of learning experience. Our own sense of satisfaction is only surpassed by that of our students, one of whom commented to us on the last day of the course that she would "remember this course forever."

Richard A. Mottram and Marie-Dominique Schock teach at the Awty International School in Houston.

The Man In The Glass

If you get what you want in your struggle for self
And the world makes you king for a day

Just go to the mirror and look at yourself and see
What the man has to say

For it isn't your father or mother or brother whose
Judgement you have to pass

The fellow whose verdict counts most in your life
Is the one staring back from the glass

Some people may think you're a straight shooting chum
And call you a wonderful guy

But the man in the glass says you're only a bum
If you don't look him straight in the eye

You may fool the whole world down the pathway of life
And get pats on your back as you pass

But your final reward will be heartaches and tears
If you've cheated the man in the glass.

Annette Ortegon
Sul Ross Middle School
San Antonio, Texas

The Handicapable Kid: A Catalyst For Growth

Helen Skrovan

The first morning he maneuvered his wheelchair into my classroom, apprehension rose near the point of panic in my throat. How would a boy with cerebral palsy manage in my classroom? How would I have to change my methods? How would I be certain my other students did not suffer because I spent more time with him?

Since worrying never helps and the federal government says, "You will," I plunged in feeling totally unqualified. With the passage of Public Law 94-142 in 1976, public schools must provide education for the handicapped in the least restrictive environment; therefore, the responsibility falls to the classroom teacher in many instances. Though many of us feel unprepared, I found in my experience this is not always the case. A certified teacher has the skills to serve the handicapped.

I would never have believed all I learned about a student with special physical problems since that first day with Roldan. The brain damage he received at birth affected his muscular coordination. He had the use of two fingers on his right hand, fairly good control of his right arm, but minimal use of his left arm. His eyes were extremely weak, affecting hand/eye coordination. He literally had to will his arm or hand to perform even the simplest tasks. Severe lip retraction complicated his speech difficulties. Physically trapped as he was, the thirteen year-old eighth grader had a good, quick mind with an I.Q. in the superior range. Furthermore, he possessed a lively imagination, a great sense of humor, and a definite desire to achieve. Armed with these facts, I proceeded carefully but optimistically.

Knowing Roldan had a speech impediment, I worried about communication. However, his slurred speech seemed to disappear once I relaxed and learned to listen carefully. I discovered that speaking for him or trying to hurry him accomplished nothing. When I encouraged him to sit up straight and hold his head erect, he could speak more clearly. He need only stimulate the area around his mouth with a wipe of his hand to curb the effects of the lip retraction. This condition caused the muscles around the lips to pull back or retract from the teeth. Because the lips are used to properly form words, the retraction make speech difficult to understand. By attending speech therapy once a week, he learned other helpful ways of improving his speech. Once the communiction barrier disappeared, my major problem became keeping him from talking. Always ready with an answer, he enthusistically participated in any class discussion.

Next, I discovered the importance of logistics when dealing with a wheelchair. My classroom was not large; therefore, the twenty-five desks had to be positioned as far from the door as possible without crowding the other students. Roldan's battery-powered wheelchair enabled him to enter and leave the room without assistance. Anything he could do on his own promoted that important feeling of independence so crucial to his development. He also knew I could disengage the clutch on his chair and render him immobile if necessary. The mere threat of this proved a valuable discipline tool when the mischief of a thirteen year-old surfaced at an inappropriate time. I learned that 250 pounds of child and wheelchair can be a dangerous weapon, so he had a specific seat assignement along with my other students. By sitting in the front of the room, he could easily see the chalkboard and overhead screen. If we were not working on an assignment together, he usually stayed on the opposite side of the room from my desk. Close to his typewriter, he had some space of

his own, yet he still felt part of the group.

Roldan used his typewriter whenever possible. He typed mainly with one finger at a good rate of speed, but someone had to attach his chair to the typewriter table and insert the paper for him. For some assignments we worked together for the sake of time. Looking back and forth from book to typewriter was slow and frustrating for him. He became discouraged when he could not keep up with the others. I would sit in a student desk, and he used the same desk top sitting at a right angle to me. We could do any assignment including a composition in this manner. I still remained available to other class members, and he could see that I wrote his exact words.

An amazing thing happened to that class. They showed a maturity beyond their years. More attentive and understanding, they displayed the ability or perhaps desire to work independently. They would not hesitate to help each other or ask me for assistance but seldom demanded more attention. This group worked well in the library where many classes try to take advantage of the freedom. They knew everyone had to work, including the teacher. Their test scores and percentage of completed assignments were consistently higher than other classes on the same level. I realized that sometimes we accept less than our students can give.

Probably the most important thing I learned from Roldan centered on the key, motivation. As the teacher of physically handicapped students, I must make them want to work. In order for them to learn, they must feel good about themselves and about what they do. I believe a special child needs special care. Anyone who thinks he/she can treat every student exactly the same will not get the desired results from the handicapped. Stressing quality not quantity, I know now not to coddle but simply show some extra understanding. Roldan could easily have been lost in piles of paper work, destroying all motivation. We usually discussed what he needed to complete and how much time it would take. I did not want him to think he had less work than his fellow students, but he did not need endless hours of homework either. After all, by the end of a school day, he had already spent ten hours in his wheelchair. Ideally a computer with the word processor and printer would have been a tremendous benefit to him and could have made that all important independence more accessible.

How did we manage? We managed beautifully. The Handicapable Kid," as he referred to himself, said, "I can do anything I set my mind to." He taught me some valuable lessons. I too can cope with anything I set my mind to. The student who will never run, dance, or even sit up by himself does think, learn, and create. Most of all, he can love like no other, making an educational experience rewarding and truly unforgetable.

Helen Skrovan teaches for the Kingsville ISD.

Closed Faces

Judy Carlile

Walking onto a new campus last fall, and full of anxiety and high hopes, I looked into the face of each eighth grade student and tried to identify the individual need. I saw open faces, scared faces, shy faces, laughing faces, but the ones that shook me right down to my toes were the closed faces. Turned off by me, the room, the school, by anything that resembled authority and education, those faces would not let me in. Rebellion screamed as the need to be attended to in these special students. I interpreted it as a cry for help.

On the first day of class, Tony strolled in and sat down on the first seat of the first row of desks. He had a closed face. With long, blue-jeaned legs stretched out in front of him and long hair that covered much of his face and pierced ear, sans earring, he did not appear enthusiastic. I called roll, and he uttered a barely audible, "Here." His body language told me he wasn't letting anyone in.

Three days later, Tony spent much of the hour playing a connect-the-dot game with his pal seated next to him. Pulling strategy from my collection of ideas for behavior modification, I went over to Tony, laid my hand on his desk, and kept talking. He turned his back to me. Then three weeks later, Tony tried the biggest test to my patience. He stood up and walked around the room pulling everyone's attention to him, especially mine. I was livid. He was amused. I called his dad.

Having won the first round, I wondered if the battle would continue. Bright but turned off by school and authority, Tony rebelled. I wondered why he behaved this way. Did he want attention so badly that he would accept even negative feedback? I watched. I listened. I learned.

I watched Tony in a confrontation with a staff member who didn't like Tony's attitude when he returned to my class from the office.

"I think you owe me an apology, Tony," the adult demanded.

Tony returned with, "I don't owe you anything."

The air bristled with hostility from both parties. Tony's face was closed.

"You can either apologize and go about your assignment or go to the office," the adult threatened.

Not because I agreed with either side but only as a solution to the problem, I asked Tony to apologize. He looked at me and apologized. He let me in.

I watched Tony, always in trouble, always in the principal's office or suspended. In one of his classes, the assignement involved constructing words from letters assigned number values that added up to one hundred. Tony's dirty words added up to a trip to the office. He did things his way. Knowing the rules, he broke them, like going to his locker between classes or eating candy in class.

I listened to Tony. He hated a teacher who would sniff Tony's clothes to see if they smelled of smoke. He partied, drank, and smoked dope. I learned that Tony had grown far older by the eighth grade than I had at that age. His life outside included drugs, sex, abuse. I wondered if I were old enough to help him.

Just before Christmas, Tony was called into the office for setting a fire in the bathroom. Questioned, judged, sentenced, and labeled incorrigible, his reputation had dictated his actions and his future. He disappeard in a flash, never to be in my English class again, off to alternative school. A couple of months later, I saw Tony at the mall. He smiled, hugged me, and told me he had been kicked out of atlernative school for not following the rules.

Tony's story isn't a success story. I don't have the answers, but I did learn to listen. I

listened and watched students like Tony and tried to understand their behavior. I learned from them, not me the teacher, but me, the student. Wanting to open these closed faces, to reach these unreceptive students, I kept my face open without preconceived opinions based on reputations. I tried to help Tony, tried to make him see that he had a choice. He realized my efforts, because neatly tucked away in the middle of a paragraph for one of the few assignements I received from him, he wrote, "My English teachers wants to help me."

Tony was special.

Judy Carlile teaches at Sam Rayburn Middle School in Northside I.S.D. San Antonio.

POETRY

Poetry is like a great ocean.
Your ideas sometimes tumble onto
paper like giant waves crashing on the sand.
While other times the tide turns,
and the waves become small and bland.

Poetry is like a sparkling waterfall,
All of your thoughts poured out of you-
It's a mysterious story unraveled
by your mind,
And only your imagination can tell the tale.

Poetry is like a river that quietly flows,
The beautiful words have a warm glow,
But the glowing comes from your innerself,
Because deep inside of all of us,
A new idea lights up.

Rachel Bacon
Earl Rudder Middle School
NISD
San Antonio, Texas

The Final Conference

Laura Dean Evans

Everyday in the lunchroom I watched a small boy with enormous blue eyes and complexion the color of someone who had been stored in a cave since birth as he sat at the special education table. Nervousness showed in his habit of pulling out tufts of hair. He often wore a cap to cover the fact that he was virtually bald, but the cap drew more attention to him. Eyes constantly darted toward anyone in the lunchroom who dared come close to his personal line of demarcation.

My principal approached me one fall afternoon and asked if I would consider mainstreaming a child in my class. My mainstream child was Jimmy, the same small boy with the blue eyes. His first visit to my classroom occurred after the dismissal bell.

"Hi, Jimmy, I'm Mrs. Evans. Welcome to my room." I didn't know if he would speak or stand silently. Solemn eyes searched mine.

Finally, with the clear conscience of a child, he stammered "M-M-M-Mrs. Evans, why don't you yell at your kids when they are bad?"

This definitely was not the response I had expected, but I replied, "I don't believe in yelling at students, Jimmy. I respect my children and treat them the same way I want teachers to treat my own two children. And," I added as an afterthought, "how did you know that I don't yell?"

"I watch you everyday in the lunchroom. You smile and you don't yell. So," the long eyelashes fluttered, "I chose you. Teacher said I could go to second grade and I chose you."

He had already crawled into the corner of my inner being, and I would love him and protect him there.

Jimmy's teacher had agreed to send him to my room the next morning at 9:00 to give me time to prepare my class for the new member. After roll call and attending to the endless administrivia of all school teachers, I hesitantly asked my students if they knew what test pilots did and the importance of their jobs. I should have not underestimated the intelligence of a second grader. Hands shot skyward all over the classroom. I explained to the class that we had been given an assignment similar to that of test pilots by helping Jimmy to "fly" in second grade. My students asked questions about Jimmy, which I answered as honestly and openly as I possibly could. Together, we decided that we would not laugh at his hesitant speech, make fun of him when he fell (which he often did), become angry with him when he made noises, and most important of all, not treat him like a baby.

At 9:00 the aide in Jimmy's class brought him to my door. Nervously, he sat in the desk I had placed near mine. After introductions to the class, I invited him to read with my better readers. Letting him interact with these students was risky, but teachers take risks on a daily basis, and his teacher had assured me he read well. When I called on Jimmy to read aloud after the group had read a page silently, he blushed, stuttered at the first few words, and then began. By the time he had finished reading, the entire class stared in quite amazement. He lifted those enormous eyes to mine and waited for a response. Tears welled in my eyes, as they did in those students who already possessed that "adult" response to be moved by something they perceived as wonderful and marvelous.

Suddenly, Chad, an extremely shy seven year old with the height and weight of a fifth grader, broke the spell by declaring, "That's the way to go, Jimmy! I wish I could read like that." Their special friendship lasted the remainder of the year. Chad had

found someone who needed him and Jimmy had found a protector, although he never really needed one.

Jimmy did not meet with success daily. Extreme nervousness made him rock so violently he would slam his head on his desk. He often sang quietly to himself in rhyming verse, constantly dropped his box of pencils and crayons, and literally yelled for me to come to him when he became immersed in his work. He often called me Mama instead of Ms. Evans. My class patiently accepted Jimmy and more than once I heard them explain about him to new students. I even heard them threaten bodily harm to the children in our neighboring classrooms if a student dared say anything about Jimmy they didn't like.

Eleven o'clock became his time to return to the safety of the special education class. Extremely nervous and tired by that time, he usually required a nap after lunch. Quite often he missed school because of illness. His pasty complexion continued to bother me greatly.

Conferences with his parents gave me no insight into Jimmy's "condition," the term applied to Jimmy's problems by his mother. I gleaned every bit of information possible from medical reports, psychiatric evaluations, and school files. I could find no answers to my questons about him.

By the end of the year, Jimmy wrote beautiful little stories and used words few eight year-old students knew. And, most important to me, his soft blond hair had grown back.

At fall registration, Jimmy came shyly to my table and asked if he could be in my room again and maybe spend the whole day like a "normal" second grader. Delighted to have his confidence and that of his parents, I agreed with his special education teacher to allow Jimmy to be mainstreamed in my class once more. Again, I used the same question and answer technique of the year before about test pilots, and my students accepted Jimmy into our room.

Jimmy amazed his classmates with long illustrated stories and accompanying tapes which included background music. Spending the entire day in our class soon became routine for him. The year passed rapidly and he continued to grow and learn, but promotion to third grade was denied because he had not completed the necessary requirements. Jimmy viewed regular testing as a punishment and could not tolerate the stress of achievement tests.

The third year I taught Jimmy he behaved like any other second grader, but he should have been in fourth grade. His subconscious bodyclock knew he wasn't really a second grader. One day he approached me and asked, "Mrs. Evans, your son Jeff and me have the same birthday, right?" I nodded my head in fear of the next question I had been waiting for him to ask for some time. "Then how come Jeff is in fourth grade and I am only in second? Why can't I be in fourth grade like Jeff?" Big eyes searched mine for an answer he knew I would try to give as I always did when he asked me any question.

I gently explained that all people are different. We discussed hair, eye, and skin color, and we talked about different sizes. I told Jimmy that I began college four years after my high school classmates, but that fact didn't mean I wasn't as smart as they were; I simply wasn't ready for college the same way he wasn't ready for fourth grade. This explanation satisfied Jimmy, for he trusted me implicitly.

In December of his third year in my class, Jimmy began to regress. Slowly, the violent rocking, crying, clumsiness, and inability to concentrate and complete a task returned. Dark circles appeared under his eyes, and he began to lose weight. I thought perhaps Christmas vacation would halt his regression and allow him to regain his resulting loss of self-confidence.

When he returned to school in January he had not improved. Notes to his parents elicited no responses. Phone messages were swallowed by answering machines and not returned. Finally, in February, parent con-

ferences began. Each one ended in much the same manner, with the blame always on my shoulders. His parents stated that I must be "doing something" to Jimmy because his homelife had not changed and could not possibly be the cause of his regression. I offered to allow them to place Jimmy in another class, but they felt that a mid-year transfer would only hurt him because he loved me so. At my suggestion, medical evaluations began. The reports came back riddled with questions about Jimmy. No one could understand his regression. The lack of discovery of organic problems left the reasons a total blank.

One late spring day, after another lengthy parent conference in which the mother assured me I should bear the blame for Jimmy's "condition," as she persisted in calling it, for want of a better label, I tearfully told them I could no longer conference with them. I loved Jimmy and would continue to teach him if they wanted me to do so, but I could not and would not subject myself to any more of their accusations. I knew that Jimmy's problems lay elsewhere.

His parents left in their separate cars after assuring me they wanted Jimmy to complete the year in my class, and agreeing not to conference with me again. Minutes later, his father timidly knocked on my door and asked if I would talk to him just once more. As we sat at the reading table, he tearfully told me of his years of poverty as a child. He had married a wealthy dominant woman who completely controlled the family. He could not forsake the lifestyle he had grown accustomed to, although he knew personal security meant the sacrifice of his son's emotional stability. The past three years while Jimmy had been in my class had been an answer to his prayers. In December, talk of divorce began again. And then, Jimmy's regression began.

He explained that seeing my tears after giving his son so much love and stability was more than he could bear. At last — at long last — he felt guilt.

Jimmy's parents divorced soon after our last conference, and eventually his mother placed him in an institution for the emotionally disturbed. In my mind, I can see a small, waxen, blue-eyed, bald teenager rocking, singing in rhyming verse, and wondering what he did to deserve this punishment. I fervently hope that he finds comfort in writing, as he once did, about the happy times we shared, unless they have been pushed too far back into the corners of his mind.

Laura Dean Evans teaches in elementary school for the Killeen ISD

"Gifted" Low Achievers

La Verne B. Johnson

Last December I found myself wandering half-heartedly around a local five-and-dime store trying to decide whether or not to buy small Christmas gifts for my students. "Time on Task" had become the "Ghost of Christmas-Past" as we teachers dared not deviate from lesson plans for even a single hour of merriment. School had become so rigid and impersonal that a celebration seemed out of place. I especially wanted to observe the holiday season with my ninth grade English as a Second Language students. Many of them were recent immigrants who already felt that school represented a cold, alien land. They ranked among the school's lowest achievers. Their lacking both communication skills and academic success caused feelings of isolation from the mainstream of our student body. My students needed some demonstration of caring, a token of affection, to increase their feelings of self-esteem. I felt concerned and wanted to help build their low self-concepts while strengthening our relationship.

I wanted to avoid the usual candy canes and pencils of holidays past, seeking instead a gift that represented the true spirit of giving. But I had nothing of that nature except my caring and my craft. As my Christmas present I chose to write to them. Each gift had to be both personal and unique. With just a week remaining until the holiday vacation, little time was left to accomplish the task. The solution came in the form of their own most individual possessions — their names. I gave all my students the meanings and histories of their most familiar feature. I drew on their interest in themselves to demonstrate that I, too, was interested in them. I purchased several boxes of Christmas cards and began to write. After signing each card with the usual holiday greetings, I added a short note describing the name and its etymology. Sarah would have found, "Sarah, Your names means 'Princess.' It was originally a Hebrew word. Other forms of your name are Sally and Sara."

My students' pleased reactions were worth my efforts. They seemed surprised to learn that names had meanings and were eager to read each other's cards. Those who did not like their given names found beauty and value in the original meaning. They also enjoyed seeing that similar names shared a common base. They realized that they were part of a global family of names not separated and isolated from their peers, but joined, unified, a part of the whole. Their interest in names inspired many of them to look up names on their own. Many of them wrote their own notes to parents, brothers, sisters, and friends. They eagerly shared something in English class during a season of sharing.

A teacher attempting this project would be surprised to learn how readily information can be found. There are a number of "What to Name the Baby"-type paperback books on the market. Libraries often have such editions and many dictionaries include such information. It is best to have at least two different editions on hand to begin the research. Not every name will appear in every book and rather unusual names require a bit of searching. A thesaurus or dictionary of synonyms is also helpful to provide other word choices when the meaning of Brenda turns out to be "Sword" or Cecil means "Blind." References to Greek and Roman gods impress adolescents; however, if the definition gives only, "after the Roman goddess . . . ", include a short list of her powers or domain. Biblical names are more interesting if a concordance is used to supply references to book, chapter, and verse for the inquisitive to learn more about their ancient namesakes.

This concept could be expanded to a jour-

nal entry or other writing experience. Students can write on why their names describe their personalities. They might enjoy exploring related topics using sentence stubs such as, "If I could change my name . . ." or "A name that would be perfect for a son/daughter would be . . ." Many ideas for writing topics might be generated by such personal and individual inspiration.

The monetary cost of this gift was minimal — much less than candy canes or pencils. The value to my ninth graders was priceless. I have discovered a gift that brings joy to both giver and receiver. I can use this idea to bring "Time on Task" and the "Spirit of Christmas-Present" into my holiday lesson plans.

La Verne B. Johnson teaches in McAllen ISD

"I'm pretty good at . . ."

Polly James

One of the favorite activities of my fourth grade gifted classes is one we call, "mini-speeches." No matter how enthusiastically or creatively this lesson is introduced, it is always met with many sighs and groans and suspicious or unhappy looks. Most of the students have already decided, by age nine, that they hate talking in front of a group.

The class responds a little better once the directions are given and an example is demonstrated. We discuss the reasons students don't like to talk in front of groups and what it means to be a "risk-taker." I often share my own fears about talking in front of peers, and stress that this class is special because we are supportive of each other and won't make fun of our friends. Some of the students will nod in agreement, while others still look uncomfortable, either not believing or just not wanting to talk in front of their peers.

Each student draws an open-ended topic statement from a box, and then everyone sits quietly for one minute so that they can organize their thoughts. When it is their turn to speak, each student stands, completes their sentence, and shares four or more sentences or ideas that tell about the topic. The topic statements are non-threatening such as, "If I could travel to another city, it would be . . ."; "If I could change the world, I would . . ."; "I like friends who . . "; "If I were president of the United States, I would . . . ."

This lesson is great for building self-confidence, poise, and the ability to organize thoughts quickly. The activity also works well with older students and can be used in a variety of ways. With some creative adaptation, this can be used as a pre-writing technique by having the students draw open-ended statements such as: "During the snow storm . . . "; "The loud clanking noise . . . "; "Crawling through the . . ."; "As the door opened . . . ."

Once the students have survived the first "mini-speech," they want to do it over again. It quickly becomes a favorite activity, especially if the students use their ideas. Usually, one of the students suggests or requests that everyone write a statement to put in the box. After a short discussion on procedure, the students submit one or more statements which are later typed and put into the box for future mini-speeches. speeches.

Whenever I think about this activity, I always remember Nate. He was a handsome, bright young man of nine, with dark

hair, brown eyes, a friendly smile, and the type of personality that made him a favorite friend of girls as well as boys (which is unusual at this age). The day this lesson was introduced to Nate's class, it received the usual responses. We started the speeches that day with two volunteers. Then each person in the circle gave a speech when it became their turn. As various students were giving their speeches, I noticed Nate staring off into space as though he were concentrating on a very difficult assignment. Nate had such a pleasant out-going personality, I had assumed that giving a speech would be easy for him.

When it was Nate's turn, he began his speech, "I'm pretty good at playing the piano." He went on to tell about the hours he practiced, his music teacher, and how his mother insisted he learn to play. As soon as he finished, Ryan almost shouted, in a tone of total amazement, "Nate! Why did you talk about playing the piano? You're great at a whole bunch of things . . . football, baseball, math, soccer!" "I know," replied Nate in a soft voice, "but I'm real good at those things, and I'm only pretty good at playing the piano."

Once again there was that sudden flash of understanding (which is difficult to explain) that gifted students "think differently from other students." The deep concentration I had seen was Nate mentally arranging on a scale the things he did well trying to find one that would fit into his perception of "pretty good." Gifted students frequently have a perspective that is different from most students. Some teachers love the creativity or uniqueness of their perspective as it can bring new thoughts and view points to a discussion or an in-depth understanding of a topic. Other teachers dislike this "different perspective" as it may take a discussion in a different direction than they had planned. Some teachers feel annoyed when the student's perspective shows that the student may know more than they do about a specific topic. The "kid" may be referred to as a "smart-aleck" as he/she quickly tries to help the teacher by correcting his/her mistakes and asking questions he/she cannot answer.

Not only are the perspectives of the gifted student different, so are their frustrations. Many students, like Nate, have the ability to excel in a variety of areas. But this "gift" also has its frustrations. Some high school gifted students have trouble deciding on a career or a class schedule because they have a wide range of interests, they feel competent in many areas, and they can visualize being successful in several careers. In the regular classroom the frustration for most students deals with understanding the subject and how to accomplish the assignment — how to work the math problems or how to write the story. The teacher will explain, assist, and encourage.

Gifted students, however, usually understand the subject and the assignment may seem easy, but they still face frustrations. If the assignments are frequently "too easy," they are bored. If the finish their work too soon, they are assigned more boring problems or they must write two stories instead of one. If they want to go on to the next step or the next assignment, they must wait until "everyone" is ready. If they ask for assistance, they sometimes receive negative responses such as, "You're smart. You figure it out." If they make A's and know the correct answers most of the time, many peers avoid them. Some teachers assume they don't need explanations, assistance, or encouragement, and they don't give it.

Gifted students like everyone else need a positive self-image, encouragement, and a mental challenge. Like all students they need opportunities and challenges that stretch their minds, their abilities, and their talents. Only those teachers who are willing to stretch their own minds and abilities will create the learning experiences necessary for all students. They will improve as teachers and go beyond being only "pretty good at . . . ."

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Meeting the Affective Needs of the Gifted Through the Use of Literature

Bob Seney

Perhaps the greatest joy in working with gifted students is sharing their enthusiasm for reading. Many, if not most, gifted students are highly motivated readers. Indeed, it is often this joy of reading that becomes the "coping factor" in their lives. Through their reading they learn to deal with a world that is really not equipped to deal with gifted persons. By their self-directed reading, gifted students extend their knowledge bases, enhance their skills, and even specialize their capabilities in areas of advanced learning. It now becomes a question of how we can use the highly motivated interest and skill in answering and meeting other needs of the gifted student. Among these other needs are their affective needs.

Included in nearly every list of characteristics of the gifted student are several descriptions which suggest that gifted students have heightened sensitivities to feelings, values, and emotions. We must, therefore, address the area of affective learnng in gifted education. By teaching students to apply their high level cognitive abilities to affect-based information, we help them make some sense of their emotional world. "The educational program must provide them with opportunities to bring emotional knowledge and assumptions to awareness, and to apply verbal ability and inquiry skills in the service of affective development" (Clark, 1983). The affective need of the gifted student are well recognized and supported by research. It is now our responsibility to provide effective, educational planning to meet these needs.

In my class room, I utilize two basic approaches to help gifted students identify, explore, and explain their feelings and attitudes toward themselves, their giftedness, and their world. One approach utilizes a model of the individual based on the work of Dr. Paul Tournier (1957). The other is a program of individualized reading which we call D.I.R., Directed Individualized Reading. Both of these approaches utilize adolescent and young adult literature.

The basic premises underlying the use of these two techniques are the same. First, the opportunity to deal with fictional or historical characters is provided. Second, a vocabulary and a strategy for character analysis is introduced. Thus creating a base from which the student may discuss his/her own affective needs and problems. The two approaches help "defuse" this sensitive area and the student is "freed up" to better discuss his/her own problems, feelings, and needs. By relating to the character about which he/she has read, the gifted student is often able to readily identify an approach to solving or coping with their own particular situations.

The first approach, the Tournier Model, is based on the work of Dr. Paul Tournier (1957). Tournier suggests a model to aid us in understanding the individual. He describes the individual as being made up of two aspects: the Person and the Personage. The personage is that part of you which others see: the personal vehicle. However, it goes beyond physical appearance to the basic personality, sense of humor, etc. The person is that which is uniquely "you". It is the inner source of your being, the creative aspect of your identity. These aspects are drawn as interlocking circles. The intent is to move the two circles together so that the shared area is as large as possible. This means that the way you appear to others is carefully and deliberately designed to show who you are as a "person". In other words, the shared area becomes a window that

others use to **know** you. Unfortunately, most of us do just the opposite and the window becomes a wall to hide the true self.

The circles are moved together through the use of dialogue. By dialogue, Tournier means not just discussion but "gut-level" communication. Through this dialogue a snow ball effect occurs: the more I know who I am — the more I can give you — the more I give, the more I know who I am. In this sense, we find that we are truly social cretures, that we are "defined" by our interaction with others. We are more ourselves in dialogue than in individual contemplation.

After this model has been introduced to the students, they are asked to select a favorite character from a novel which they have recently read. They are then asked to identify in chart form personage and person aspects of their selected character as developed and revealed in the novel. After discussion and sharing with the class or the teacher, the student writes a character sketch. Additional writing assignments or discussions develop such questions as: How are you like this character? How are you different from this character? In what way do you most relate to this character? Have you ever had the same problems as your character? After using the model with a fictional character, the student is usually comfortable enough with it to apply it to himself. Since I deal with middle school students, I always communicate with their parents to explain the model and to define my goals in using this model. At this time, I have not had any parental objections. I never force the student to share with his/her classmates any personal discoveries or insights. However, many have volunteered to share various aspects of their insight and growth.

The other approach which I use in my classroom is an adaptation of D.I.R., Directed Individualized Reading. D.I.R. is an approach to reading which captilizes upon the student's own motivation and interests. It gives the student time to read books of his/her own choosing and then provides the opportunity to share the excitement, joy, and adventure of his/her reading with someone who has read the same book. This program is research based and utilizes the work and leadership of Dr. Richard F. Abrahamson, University of Houston, and Dr. Karen Kutiper, District Coordinator of Language Arts, Alief Independent School District, Houston, Texas. The program has been developed and refined by myself and my colleagues, Lois Buckman and Teri Lesesne at Albright Middle School.

A complete description of D.I.R. and guidelines for use are available in **D.I.R.: A Guide** (Seney, 1984). Only the goals and the major components are listed here in order to relate D.I.R. to meeting affective needs.

In D.I.R. classroom time is devoted entirely to reading and conferenceing. The suggested length of time for this unit is three weeks. During this time, the student reads books of his/her choosing and prepares conferences on the books which have been completed. The Goals of D.I.R. are 1) To enhance the student's joy of reading; 2) To provide time for students to read; 3) to expand the reading interests of students; 4) To allow students to share their excitement for a book with someone who had also read the same book; and 5) To encourage the student to relate to his/her reading on the higher levels of thinking (eg. Bloom's Taxonomy). The major components are 1) Five to ten minutes of reading aloud by the teacher each day; 2) Three weeks of a thematic unit in literature; 3) Three weeks of reading in class; 4) The preparation and presentation of a book conference; and 5) A focus on the connection between all the language arts.

If I have stressed any component of D.I.R., it is conferencing. The skills of selecting a topic, preparing the conference, and presenting it are at the very center of D.I.R. This is the sharing component but the conference also leads the student to a deeper analysis of the book and sharpens his communication skills as well.

When I am dealing with affective needs, I develop a thematic unit based upon an area of concern (eg. identity, family relationships, death, etc.). In lieu of free choice of books, the students are given a list of books from which to choose. The books on this list relate to specific problems which adolescents face. The list has a preponderance of books which deal with gifted adolescents.

All conferences are designed around character analysis. The characters are discussed in terms of the Tournier Model or in terms of Initial Character, Forces of Change, and Final Character. After the D.I.R. conferences have been completed, class discussions are held in which the students relate the problems, characteristics, and situations of the characters of which they have read. The students are then asked to compare the characters to themselves. Again the focus is to "defuse" the area of personal problems and/or needs by dealing first with historical or fictional characters. Since many gifted students are able to quickly transfer learning to other situations, this approach has been successful in dealing with affective needs.

The area of affective needs of the student is often neglected. This may prove to be an extremely serious oversight in dealing with the gifted student. Many lists of characteristics of the gifted often list several traits which directly relate to the affective domain (Clark, 1983). Therefore we are dealing with a clientel that is especially sensitive to and cognizant to their own affective needs. The approaches described here are offered as two possibilities in dealing with these affective needs. They are especially attractive to gifted students since they involve reading, a skill which they enjoy and on which they rely in order to deal with a society or school setting that is often not designed to meet their special needs and which may even be hostile to them.

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Poetry

Poetry, poetry,
Could you please tell me
Your true meaning,
Because to me you're a mystery.

I researched and studied,
But books were of no use.
I questioned my teacher,
But she just smiled at me.

Then one day I wandered into the woods,
And suddenly caught a glimpse of wild flowers,
I picked up a pen that night,
And realized the true meaning of poetry.

Marvin Cortez
San Antonio, Texas

The Final Say

Compassion, Privacy, and the Act of Writing

Carol Lively Record

Yesterday I sat with tears streaming down my face in a discussion of the pros and cons of journal writing. I cried as I recalled a personal, very negative experience with journal writing. My tenth grade Engish teacher asked our class to keep a journal.

"Don't worry about it," he told us. "Write as often as you like, but try to write at least three times a week. Write anything you want to write."

My heart sank. Mr. Smith, I thought, how can you do this to me? You're my favorite teacher of all time, but I don't want to tell you my private thoughts. They won't be private anymore.

As if he could read my mind, Mr. Smith continued, "Don't worry about your privacy. I'm the only one who will read what you write, so you can write anything at all."

How can you tell me not to worry! My stomach is tied in knots. I like you and want to please you, but I can't strip my soul bare for you!

As I related this story to my collegues, the anguish of nearly twenty years ago flooded over me. I could not hold back the tears.

The problem began at my birth, as I am a twin. My identical twin sister Laurel and I lived together almost twenty-four hours a day. We shared a room in our home. We went to Sunday school and church choir together. We looked and talked very much alike. Our own father had difficulty telling us apart.

The school structure amplified our togetherness. Because our birthday falls in November, we started the school year in January when most students began the second semester. All through elementary school regular-term students might be placed in either of two classes, but mid-termers remained together. So, Laurel and I had class together all day. Of course, in junior high as well, fewer classes were offered to us mid-termers. Naturally drawn to the same interests and having similar abilities, we tended to take the same classes, at least for the majority of the day.

Then came high school, which began with tenth grade. Laurel and I, brand new sophomores, going through all the normal pain of being fifteen, shared all but one possession, our private thoughts. She knew some of my thoughts anyway just because she would react to any given situation in a similar way to me. Now our teacher wanted us to share our thoughts with **him**. No longer would the one thing I had of my own belong to me alone.

This teacher remains my favorite teacher. He tried his best to understand the difficulty Laurel and I had writing in our journals, but it mystified him. My mother tried to explain to him, but she really did not understand herself. Even Laurel and I could not at the time verbalize why we could not write. We simply felt that he wanted to invade our privacy. Even trying to justify our reluctance to write meant giving something up.

So what does all this mean for other teachers? Obviously, although I still have not worked through the trauma of more than half my life ago, I survived and even became an English teacher myself. One can learn a lesson from my story: not every assignment is appropriate for every student. Teachers must offer a variation for those

few who cannot handle the given topic. In my case the lack of a topic caused the problem. If I had been asked to write about "the price of tea in China," I could have put something on the paper. On the contrary, someone else may have pressing family problems he or she needs to work out on paper when the teacher assigns him or her to write on "my favorite color and why." From my experience I have learned to offer a topic for journal writing but to allow students the option to write on topics of their choice.

This lesson applies to other writings as well as journals. A teacher should question the suitability of any personal revelation, as all writing to a certain extent becomes. My older sister, who has four adopted children, tells the story of the adopted son of a friend of hers. After a unit on biography and autobiography, his teacher thought it an excellent idea to have each student write his or her autobiography. This young boy, however, had survived abusive parents, taken from their home and put up for adoption. Luckily, even though he was an older child, a loving family adopted him. Because the new family contrasted so greatly and his new life improved so much over his young childhood, he completely forgot his early life. The time from his birth to his adoption was a total blank, yet his teacher wanted him to write about this time. Fortunately, the boy's mother managed to explain the situation. The teacher offered the child either to make up the story of his early life or to tell only the recent part of his life since adoption. This sensitive teacher offered two alternatives to the assignment.

Although you may never have a student as sensitive as I was, empathy and awareness of situations such as I have described can make a difference to our students. Eventually, the student may work through his or her emotions in writing, but you may not see it in your class. I can only now write about my case even though many years have passed. Making an adjustment for one student may seem small, but its influence can be great. The assignment should be less important than the person.

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